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ARYA SAMAJ

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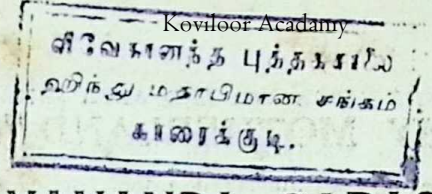

DAYANANDA SARASWATI AND ARYA SAMAJ

The year 1824 saw the birth of a remarkable child in a Hindu family. Hinduism was then at its lowest ebb in the Punjab. It looked that unless some new strength was put in, it would completely decay. The arrival of the child, who grew to be known as Dayananda Saraswati, was timely. He was a unique genius. He combined in himself the saint, the sage, the social reformer and the patriot.

This great man was born at Morvi, the capital of a very small state in Gujerat. Amba Shankar, his father, was a rich Brahmin zemindar and banker with a very strong religious turn of mind.

At the age of five, Mool Shankar (that was the name of Swami Dayananda before he became a sanyasin) was taught the Devanagiri characters. At eight he was invested with the sacred thread. His first regular teacher was his own father. He was hardly ten, when he began the daily worship of the idol of Siva.

After four years, came the incident which gave a new turn to his life. At the festival of Sivaratri, the whole family retired to a Siva temple to keep vigil. Mool Shankar had been strictly told to keep awake the whole night, otherwise all the merit of the fast and vigil would be lost. The midnight service was over, many were drowsy, and the boy's father was the first to fall asleep, and the rest followed suit with the single exception of Mool Shankar. He was

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chanting the Vedic Mantras with his gaze fixed on the *lingam*, when suddenly a number of mice rushed out of the walls and made a merry feast of the nuts, raisins and other offerings and also ran up and down the image. This scene though not unusual, struck Mool Shankar in a strange way and started in his mind the question whether the image before him was the same Siva as had been described in the Puranas, the mighty God, and ruler of the three worlds. He could not find the answer himself, and extremely upset, he aroused his father from sleep and put the question to him. The father was annoyed and gave him some sort of answer, which did not satisfy the boy. From that day onwards Mool Shankar gave up the worship of idols.

More Shocks

While he was absorbed in finding a solution to this question, his sister fell ill and died suddenly. This gave him a great shock, and showed him the transitory character of life and the vanity of human aspirations. He had hardly recovered from this shock when his uncle passed away. This death was additional proof that life here on this earth was but a fleeting show.

He was hardly twenty when he made up his mind that knowledge was the key to happiness and immortality. Accordingly he entreated his father to send him to Benares for education. Knowing the ascetic tendencies of his son, Amba Shankar sternly refused to send him to Kasi. Then he requested to be sent to a neighbouring village, where there was a *patashala*. This desire was acceded to and Mool Shankar was allowed to go.

Only for a short time he was in the school. Finding that he had firmly resolved never to marry and fearing that he might slip away, the teacher sent him back to his parents. On his reaching home, his father arranged for his marriage.

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Mool Shankar saw the net closing around him. Now or never was the time for him to escape the thraldom of a married life and he made up his mind to leave at once. Accordingly one summer night he left his bed and disappeared, never to come back.

Capture and Escape

He reached a village named Sayala where he was given ochre robes and renamed Shudha Chaitanya by a Brahmacharin, the head of a religious sect there. Sometime later he met a band of Bairagis and learnt some of the peculiarities of their denomination. In the course of his wanderings he came to the fair held at Sidhapore every year in the month of Kartik. There he met a Bairagi, who was an acquaintance of his father's. He recognised Mool Shankar and reproved him strongly for leaving his home. The Bairagi at once wrote to his father about the whereabouts of Mool Shankar. Amba Shankar arrived at once, to the surprise of his son, at the temple, where he had been putting up. The ochre robes of the boy so enraged Amba Shankar, that he almost brutally tore them to pieces, broke the begging bowl and heaped such a shower of abuses on him that Mool Shankar began to tremble, and almost terror-stricken he fell at his father's feet. He was given new clothes and taken to another place, where he was put under the watch of a number of servants. The youth's one thought was how to slip away, and when the servants fell fast asleep, he got out. Fearing lest he should again fall into his father's hands, he ascended the steeple of a temple and supporting himself there by the branches of a tree, kept himself concealed all night. The father and his men went in search, but finding it vain, returned home.

Once again free, he went to Baroda, and coming into contact with some Vedantists he was able to get a grasp of their philosophy.

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Sanyasin at Twenty-four

He soon arrived at the Asram of some holy men on the banks of the Nerbada and requested a master to initiate him into the brotherhood of sanyasins. But he was refused admittance on account of his young age. For about a year and a half he remained in the Asram, and one day there arrived a venarable sanyasin named Poornananda Saraswati, Mool Shankar entreated him to initiate him into the order, and at the recommendation of a learned Maharatta pandit, he was made a sanyasin and his name was changed to Swami Dayananda Saraswati, which he bore ever afterwards. He was now only twenty-four years.

The next eleven years of his life, were passed in wandering, pilgrimages, study, practice of Yoga and ther austerities. He visited almost all the sacred places in Upper India. One effect of these wanderings was that he learned hardiness and endurance. He had on several occasions to go without food and shelter and had to pass nights in jungles in the midst of wild animals. One day he had to pass through a thick forest on the banks of the Nerbada and he met with a wild boar. The beast charged him, but the Swami, keeping cool flourished his long staff in the air. The beast took fright and ran away. It was late in the night, when he arrived near a hut. Not liking to disturb the repose of the inmates, he climbed a big tree nearby and passed the whole night there.

The Blind Teacher

At the age of thirty-six, he went to Mathura to sit at the feet of Swami Virjananda, a famous sanyasin, a Punjabi by birth, who had lost his eyes at early age in consequence of a severe attack of small-pox. By a persistent love of knowledge and ardent devotion to studies, he had become one of the most famous Sanskrit scholars of his day. He passed his time in meditation and teaching Vedic works to a small num-

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ber of pupils. He was a man of very harsh and strict temperament and his views were far in advance of the Pandits of his time. He attached no importance to the modern works on Sanskrit grammar and was bitterly opposed to the modern Vedic commentaries. As soon as Swami Dayananda approached him, he was asked to name the books he had already read. He named *Saraswata* and other such books. " Throw them into the river Jumna" was the reply of the Guru. Dayananda was enjoined never to look up to such modern books as authorities on any subject connected with the study of the Vedas.

The connection of Swami Dayananda with Swami Virjananda decided his career. If he had not come to this Guru, he might have become a greater Pandit than he was, might have solved the difficult problems of grammar and philosophy, might have perhaps even realised the deepest secrets of Yoga, but he could not have become the mighty worker and reformer that he soon became. All this was due to the inspiring personality of the blind Rishi at Mathura.

Being a harsh man, the master beat Dayananda several times, but as he was an old man above eighty, the disciple always requested him not to beat him with his hand, as it punished the Guru more than the sturdy pupil. The old man once gave Dayananda such a blow on his hand with a stick that the latter carried the mark for life and used to remember the kind offices of his Guru whenever his eyes fell on the scar.

The Patriotic Vow

At last the time for Dayananda to take leave of his Guru came. The master asked him what he had to give as *Guru dakshina*. Dayanand had not even a pie with him. He had brought from somewhere a pound of cloves and laying the humble offering at the feet of the Guru, he begged for leave and benediction, with profuse apologies for his poor offering.

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"Do you think," said the Guru, "I shall require you to pay me what I know you have not got?"

"All that is mine, my very life is at your service" was Dayananda's reply.

The old Guru was gratified to hear it and said, "So then, make the best use of your talents, spread light, remove darkness. Take out the people from the sloughs of superstition and ignorance. The Hindus have forgotten what their true religion is. They have set up stocks and stones in place of the one true God and have installed their own composition in place of the Vedas and the works of the Rishis. Let it be your one aim and object, the goal and mission of your life. The work is gigantic no doubt, but gird up your loins and the God of the Rishis will bless you and your efforts."

On receiving these holy orders Swami Dayanand at once set to work. He went to Agra and delivered some speeches, which attracted much notice. Than he travelled over to Gwalior and then to Jaipore, where the Maharajah welcomed him with great reverence and enthusiasm.

Clash with Orthodox

In April 1867, a great fair was held at Hardwar in connection with the Kumba festival. The Swami went there, and every day he preached his gospel and condemned idol worship and denounced pilgrimages with such vehemence as raised a storm of opposition against him. The Pandas and their friends gnashed their teeth but to no purpose. After the fair was over, he made a tour through all the important towns on the banks of Ganges. One of his greatest discussions against the orthodox party was held at Benares, under the auspices of its Maharajah. About thirty of the leading Pandits took part. The Swami stood alone. The subject was whether the Vedas countenanced idol workhip and Dayanand won. The pandits issued writs of ex-communication against him, but the Swami did not mind them a bit.

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Travelling through all the important stations from Kashi Swami Dayananda reached Calcutta and there met Maharishi Devendra Nath Tagore, and Babu Kheshab Chandra Sen. He delivered many lecturers.

He had been using Sanskrit as the medium of his speeches up to this time, but thenceforward adopted Hindi. On his way back from Calcutta he halted at Allahabad and after deliverying many lectures there he reached Bombay. It was in Bombay that he established the first Arya Samaj. Thence he went to Poona and by his lectures created such an alarm among the orthodox Brahmans that they instigated the rabble to attack him. His life was saved by the timely help of the police who arrested several ruffians.

Bid for National Unity

Towards 1846, the Swami left the Deccean to attend the Durbar which was held at Delhi in January, the following year. He utilised this opportunity to lay his doctrine before the educated community and called together a meeting of the leaders to devise means for bringing together all heterogeneous elements of the Hindus and Mahomedans of India. The Swami earnestly appealed to them to merge all differences and unite together to work out the salvation of the country. But the desired end was not achieved, owing to radical differences in the views of the parties concerned.

After the dissolution of the Durbar, he went to the Punjab at the request of some leading Punjabis. After preaching for 20 days at Ludhiana he reached Lahore, and it was here the Swami achieved the greatest success that ever crowned his labours in any part of India. He remained only for about a year in the Punjab. After establishing Samajs in almost every important town, the Swami went back to work in the United Provinces. The ground had been prepared by his first tour, the seed had been sown and now there cropped up an Arya Samaj in every important centre.

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From the United Provinces he went into Rajputana. Princes after Princes welcomed him. On repeated personal invitations of the officers of the Maharajah of Jodhpore he set out for that city and received a magnificent welcome. The ruler of the State, Maharajah Jaswant Singh, had then fallen into evil ways and forgotten his dignity and noble descent under the influence of a common woman. The Swami was welcomed by the Commander-in-Chief and other high dignitaries of the State, but the Maharajah had been under the impression that the Swami, like many others who had visited his Kingdom, would go to pay his respects to him. He did not know what stuff Dayanand was made of. Many days passed and neither went to see the other. At last the Maharajah realised that the dignity of a true sanyasin was even greater than that of a prince. He visited the Swami and with great humility offered apologies for this seeming indifference.

The Fatal Victory

As days went on the Swami learned that the Maharajah and many of the State functionaries were addicted to the grossest vices to the great prejudice of the State. In a short time he succeeded in reclaiming them all.

All this the Swami achieved—but at the cost of his life. The woman who had been holding the Maharajah under her evil influence saw that it was the Swami who had weaned away the prince from her. It is said that she somehow or other managed to poison Swamiji through his food. He fell ill and his case grew every day worse. He went to Abu, the famous hill-resort, but even there he did not improve. He came down, and expert physicians attended on him, but all were helpless. At last he reached Ajmere and here he passed away on the 30th of October, 1883, on the night of the Deepawali.

Teachings

Swami Dayananda's mission was to resuscitate the Vedic religion and the Vedic culture. It was his belief that God

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Himself had revealed the four Vedas to four Rishis. He said: "Just as, when a musical instrument is played, the man who plays the instrument and not the instrument itself is responsible for the music, or when a doll is made to dance the man who pulls the wire and not the doll itself is responsible for its movements, even so God is the real author of the Vedas, while the Rishis are only chosen means of communication."

According to him the fundamental teaching of the Vedas is: "God alone has a complete knowledge of all things, whether past, present or future. He is the source of all things. He is the Ommipotent one. All the descriptions and all the fables that abound in the Vedas only reveal and manifest him."

He held that "a faithful study of the Vedas and a proper performance of the duties prescribed by them are absolutely essential for success in this world, as well as for the true service of fellow men."

Factories for Quill Drivers

Interesting is the Swami's attitude towards the education of children. He said, "Let every boy be taught the sacred duty of fulfilling his promises under any circumstances. Let him not indulge in idle talk or gossip: let him talk little and always to the point. Let him be unwearied in developing himself physically, mentally and morally."

He was greatly pained at the decay of our ancient system of education and the planting in its place of the western system designed to produce only clerks and officials. It was his ambition to revive the ancient system based on pure Vedic culture. He said, "the prince and the peasant should be treated exactly alike in the class room. All should be taught the ideals of simplicity and abstinence."

The Kangri Gurukula founded by Swami Shradhanand, a desciple of Dayananda, aims at translating these views into practice.

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The Swami laid great stress on the moral development. One day a certain young man brought to him a friend who was addicted to sexual immorality, seeing him the swami said: "Sexual vice brings a stain on the family, which can never be removed. All sense of discretion and decency is lost by over-indulgene in sexuality. There can be no purity of of life in the family of a man addicated to lust. His family becomes extinct or, if it is not actually extinct, his descendants become immoral and vicious in their turn."

Then he asked the young men, "If a daughter is born to a man of a prostitute, what would she be?" To which they replied, "what else could she be but a prostitute?" Then Swamiji said in piercing accents, "Look here, young men, do you think that any decent man in the world would like to see his daughter leading the life of a prostitute? But this is inevitable result and lust and prostitution. Is it not a most frightful thing?" This opened the eyes of the young man and he at once gave up his evil life.

Serve Fearlessly

It was not enough, he said, that man was moral. He should serve humanity. "Always make it a point," he said, "to do those things that are conducive to universal good; let all your efforts aim at the happiness of your fellow creatures. It is the law of God that the happiness of an individual will be proportionate to the nature and extent of the service that he does to the world.

"Man should sacrifice his all for the spread of knowledge and for the relief of the infirm and the destitute. And whatever superflous wealth he has should be spent in starting new industries so that men may be able to find a means of livelihood. No sacrifice can be too great to make the world more happy and more virtuous."

The Swami warned all against playing false to their conscience. He preached that man should always speak the

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truth irrespective of consequences. "Truth-speaking," he said, "means the fearless and unambiguous expression of just the sentiments that one feels in one's heart of hearts. There should not be any disparity between his thoughts, words and actions.

"True manhood lies in rejecting what is false, and in cleaving only to that which is true. Truth alone wins in the end; untruth always suffers defeat sooner or later."

One day, in a meeting at Bareilly, he made some bold criticisms of Christianity and its tenets. At that meeting the Commissioner and several other European officials were present; they were much offended. The Commissioner expressed his displeasure, with many a threat, to one of Swamiji's friends. The Swamiji got scent of this, and so at the next day's lecture in the presence of the Commissioner and other officials, he exclaimed: "People come to me and ask that I should not speak out the truth. The Commissioner may get angry, the Governor himself may be incensed, but I am unable to give up the expression of truth for fear of any human being, however powerful he may be. I fear none in my discharge of the duty of truth-speaking. I firmly believe that my soul is eternal and indestructible. If anyone were to convince me that my soul can be broken to pieces or destroyed, then and not till then shall I begin to doubt the wisdom of truth speaking. But it is altogether impossible that I should cease to speak out my convictions, merely for the sake of this fragile frame of mine merely to prolong my life on earth by a day or two."

All were taken aback by this unexpected outpouring; but all were powerfully impressed with his fearlessness and unbending devotion to truth.

Married Happiness

Swamiji attached great importance to the due discharge of the duties in connection with domestic and other relations

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of man. He said that the man who did not discharge these duties satisfactorily, was not likely to acquit himself well in other matters.

He says that the relation between the husband and wife should be scrupulously observed. Man and wife should avoid all such things as displease or offend each other, should be straightforward and honest in their mutual dealings and should ever be intent on service and well doing. A husband and wife who behave to each other in this way are sure to have good children, and their happiness will grow from more to more.

"The husband and wife can continue to live in mutual accord, only when they marry in mature age and by mutual consent, after receiving their education during their period of *Brahmacharya*. Only such marriages produce happy unions, and the best of issues."

The Swami never overlooked the political aspect of life. In his well known work *Satyaratha-Prakash* he makes a detailed exposition of the duties of rulers.

The Mutiny had just ended. The people dared not speak of political reforms. At such a time Swami Dayananda boldly proclaimed the nation's inalienable right of self-Government. He wrote: "Self-rule is unquestionably the best for a nation. However enlightened, impartial, benevolent, and just may be the rule of the foreigner, it can never conduce to perfect happiness; for the differences of language, of traditions, of manners and customs would still remain, and so long as these differences remain, perfect sympathy and understanding between the two nations would be impossible."

Aping the West

In those days the educated people in this land were aping the westerners. Dayanand took a strong stand against this denationalisation.

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Someone told him: "The Europeans wear coats, trousers and boots and they eat their food freely at the hands of all. Hence it is that they continue to progress."

The Swamiji answered: "No, not at all. The Mussalmans also take their food from all and yet how is that they have not progressed like the Europeans? The real causes of the progress of the latter are the absence of early and premature marriage, and imparting of a sound education to all. They follow a system of love marriages. What ever they do, they do after due deliberation. They devote their all to the uplift of their country. They are ever alert and active, and never waste away their time in idleness.

"The English allow their shoes to go into the courts and offices, but not the shoes of this country. In fact, they show more respect and consideration for the shoes of their own country than even for the people of our country. It is now more than a century since they came out to India, but they still continue to wear their own clothes despite the fact that they are so unsuitable to this climate. They have not even dreamt of renouncing their customs while many men among us have not scrupled to bid good bye to their own customs and adopt those of the West. This shows how foolish we are, and how wise the Westerners are.

"Whatever work they take up, they do thoroughly well. They render all possible help to their own people. Their advance has been due to these and other virtues and not to their wearing coats, trousers and boots, or to their indiscriminate eating and drinking."

Pernicious Evils

The Swamiji was for a thorough cleansing of our society. He was the very first to fight for the rights of women. He advocated even a system of *Swayamavara* marriage.

He condemned the caste system and said that caste was based solely on men's qualities and their work; when these

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changed caste also changed. Caste was not therefore a matter of birth or parentage.

He also condemned the doctrine of untouchability.

He saw no valid objection to sea voyage.

"These foolish systems," he said, "have been responsible for the loss of our freedom, our arts and sciences, our spirit of enterprise, our wealth and our happinness. They have reduced us to a state of utter helplessness and absolute dependence on others."

Such were the views of this great man. All his teachings were guided by the one motive of making *men* of his countrymen. " He alone," says he "deserves the name of man, who develops the thinking habit and who is able to sympathise with the gains and losses, the joys and sorrows of his fellow-men ; who does not bend his knee before insolent might, but holds the righteous man, however weak, in fear ; who works heart and soul for the welfare of the righteous man, however powerless he may be, but on the other hand wages unceasing and unrelenting war against the unrighteous, however mighty and powerful ; who, despite dangers and sorrows, persists in his noble work of exalting manliness and righteousness over unmanliness and unrighteousness."

The seeds sown by Dayananda have grown into a mighty tree, yielding most healthy fruit.

Not only has Arya Samaj infused a new life into Hindus but it has led to a series of most valuable endeavours for the uplift of the Nation. Schools, Colleges and Orphanages have cropped up under its inspiration in several centres. The Kangri Gurukula has already been mentioned. The Dayananda Anglo Vedic College, Lahore, is another—a university by itself. The contribution of the Arya Samaj to every branch of National life has been most valuable and India owes it all to the great patriot—Dayananda Saraswati.

PRINTED AT THE KESARI PRINTING WORKS, MADRAS.